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LETTER DATED 22 JULY 1996 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to refer to paragraph 15 of Security Council resolution 1049 (1996), in which the Council requested me to keep it informed on the situation in Burundi. I regret that I have to convey some further alarming information on the situation in that country.

Since the oral briefings on Burundi provided last week to the Security Council both by myself and by my Representative to the Council, yet another massacre of civilians has occurred, this time at Bugendana in central Gitega province, in which more than 300 women, children and elderly men were slaughtered.

While the Burundi authorities claim that the dead were Tutsis killed by Hutu rebels of the armed wing of the National Council for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD), the CNDD has denied any role in the massacre, claiming that the victims were actually Hutus killed by soldiers of the Burundian army. To date, the United Nations has received no independent information concerning the perpetrators of this appalling crime.

Through my Spokesman, I have condemned in the strongest possible terms these wanton killings and those who carried them out. I have called on the parties to the conflict in Burundi to cease immediately their acts of violence and to cooperate fully with all those who are seeking to bring an end to the vicious cycle of atrocity and counter-atrocity. I have also urged all parties to show restraint and expressed the hope that a proper investigation of the massacre would be carried out by the Burundi authorities.

In response to these killings, Prime Minister Nduwayo has announced a week of national mourning for the latest victims of the ethnic war that continues to devastate Burundi. Life in Bujumbura ground to a halt after the former President, Mr. Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, currently president of the Parti Pour le Redressement National (PARENA), called for a two-day general strike in protest against both the killings and the Arusha "security assistance" plan. Mr. Bagaza has also reportedly called for the overthrow of the Government, which he accused of high treason, and for the formation of a patriotic front to defend Burundi's sovereignty.

It appears that the latter reaction reflects a common sentiment among the Burundi security forces as well as the CNDD. Both these conflicting groups have rejected the idea of an international peace-keeping force in Burundi and have vowed to fight it with all means at their disposal. As a result, the International Technical Committee, which was established by the Arusha Summit on 25 June 1996 and charged with working out the logistics of the regional peace plan, has been refused permission to visit Burundi. The Burundi National Security Council itself was unable last week to take a decision on the deployment and mandate of possible troop contingents, or on alternative options to the peace plan.

Rumours of an impending coup d'état are widespread, while demonstrations in Bujumbura have become increasingly militant. Tutsi youth groups have openly demanded admission to the ranks of the army in order to fight Hutu rebels.

Another matter of serious concern is the ongoing security operations to close down the Kibezi and Ruvumu camps for Rwandan refugees. Reports have been received indicating that more than 3,000 refugees have been expelled to Rwanda; 4,000 are said to have fled into the hills; and more than 12,000 are under guard at a local football stadium awaiting expulsion. In addition, many other refugees have been reported missing after attacks on the camps in which members of the local Tutsi population were involved. Kibezi camp is said to have been ransacked and its huts destroyed.

I am sure you will agree, Mr. President, that these reports only underline, once again, the pressing need for the international community to take concrete and immediate action to halt the cycle of violence and to prevent another catastrophe in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa. It is for this reason that we need to press forward with the ongoing contingency planning for a multinational force.

I should be grateful if you could bring the information contained in this letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) Boutros BOUTROS-GHALI